

EMERGENCE OF WOMEN IN SALT SATYAGRAHA IN TAMIL NADU

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: 22 Dec 2015;

Received in revised form:

24 Dec 2015;

Accepted: 24 Dec 2015;

Published online: 30 Dec 2015.

Key words:

Salt Satyagraha,

Women Salt Satyagraha,

Freedom Fight.

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses the emergence of women in the Salt Satyagraha part of Civil Disobedience movement and highlights the sacrifices made by the Tamil Women Satyagrahis in the movement. A statistical report shows that the total number of people arrested and sentenced in jail from Madras were 3,490 of which the women Satyagraha were 291. The women who were arrested in the movement were badly treated; they were given jail sentence from four months to two years. They were ill treated in the Coimbatore, Vellore and Cuddalore Jail. Women of Tamil Nadu played an exceptional role in the Salt Satyagraha Movement. The sacrifice made by the women in the Civil Disobedience Movement gave a new passion to many other women, who bravely take part the National Movement such as the Individual Satyagraha and Quit Indian Movement.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses the emergence of women in the Salt Satyagraha part of Civil Disobedience movement and highlights the sacrifices made by the women Satyagrahis in the movement. On 13th February 1930, the Working Committee of the Congress, which met at Sabarmathi Ashram, invested Gandhiji with full powers to launch the Civil Disobedience at a time and place of his choice. Gandhiji was in search of an effective formula when his minimum demands were ignored by Lord Irwin the then Viceroy. He then took the decision to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement, and by the end of February 1930, Gandhiji began to talk about violation of salt law. Gandhiji preferred salt, because he could involve almost everybody in the movement. The movement was inaugurated by Gandhiji on 4th March 1930 when he announced his intention to break the salt laws. On March 12, he undertook with seventy nine inmates of his Sabarmathi Ashram for the famous historic march to Dandi in the Surat District.

On 6th April 1930 by picking up a handful of salt Gandhiji inaugurated the Civil Disobedience Movement symbolically broke the salt law. Mahatma Gandhi made an appeal

to Indian women to come out from their household seclusion and advised them to participate in the political movement to end the British rule in India. While Gandhiji was marching to Dandi, Congress leaders were busy at various levels trying to organize similar movements in other parts of the country.

EMERGENCE OF WOMEN

The Government at last realized the national significance of the movement and introduced a series of repressive laws to crush the movement. In Tamilnadu, C. Rajagopalachari led the Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha. During this time Rukmini Lakshmipathi, Vice President of Tamil Nadu provincial Congress Committee, accompanied with Rajaji and march to Vedaranyam to break the Salt Laws in 1930. She addressed many meetings all along the way. In the course of the speech, she exhorted the people to come forward in large numbers to join the Civil Disobedience Movement and break the salt law, which she characterized as the most iniquitous law. She went about fearlessly taking upon herself all possible risks. She appealed to the women to join the movement in large numbers and help the leader in breaking the salt law. She was the first lady to be arrested and was sentenced to undergo a simple imprisonment for a period of one year. She was sent to the Central Jail Vellore to serve the term. The leadership and the arrest of Ruckmani Lakshmipathy inspired the women of Tamil Nadu to take part in the later movements. Thus the women of Tamil Nadu were gradually attracted towards the national movement.

In Madras city, Durgapai played a prominent role in mobilizing the support of women to the movement. Addressing a meeting at Sriramulu Park, Madras on 3rd April 1930, Durgabai exhorted the people to participate in the Satyagraha Movement started by Gandhiji. In her speech, she talked about the Salt Act, imposed by the Britishers against the poor Indians and asked the people to disobey the Salt Act.

On 7th April 1930, a procession was organised by the Andhra patrika office, led by K. Nageswara Rao, and many women who took part in the procession were Durgabai, Venkataramanamma, Saraswathi Pandurangan and Kamakshiammal. The procession passed through the Loane Square, there was a meeting in which appeals were made for volunteers and funds.

On the evening of 7th April 1930, in a meeting on the High Court Beach, Prakasam announced that he was leading a batch of Satyagrahis from Madras to make salt and he asked the volunteers to enlist their names. Durgabai also spoke on that occasion. In her speech, she praised Gandhiji and his movement and appealed for funds. She exhorted the people to enlist themselves in large numbers in the struggle. Durgabai said that their goal was either to win Swaraj or to die in that attempt.

On 14th April, Angachiammal along with T. Prakasam addressed a meeting, which was presided over by K. Nageswara Rao. Congress volunteers manufactured salt on that occasion. Angachiammal told the Deputy Commissioner of Police, that even if he forcibly tried to take the salt from her hands she would not allow the salt to be released. The Deputy Commissioner gave orders to take possession of the vessels and other things kept therein. Durgabai said that ladies who were some years back afraid of the empty hands of policemen were now not afraid of even their lathis. They were prepared to undergo any hardship. The Government was afraid of ladies more than men. She concluded by appealing

for support for the salt Satyagraha and other national campaigns. On 23rd and 24th April meetings were held on Triplicane Beach. Durgabai and Kamatchiammal spoke in these meetings supporting the Civil Disobedience Movement.

On 25th April 1930 about 100 volunteers, accompanied by Durgabai and led by Natarajan, left Swarajya office and reached North Disobedience Campaign. Women offered both Nageswara Rao and each Road to break the salt law. They were stopped by the policemen and were warned to disperse, but they refused. Police used force by lathis and asked Durgabai and Varahaluammal to disperse. The crowd was dispersed by the use of force.

The Vellore District was perfectly calm till Durgabai went there on 21 May 1930. She delivered very violent and inflammatory speeches at Gudiyatham, Vellore, Arni and Arcot on the 20, 22nd and 25th instances and incited the masses to disobey the orders of the Government. As the direct result of her speeches in the district, a mob gathered round the Arcot bus stand and attacked some of the busmen who carried the political prisoners from Arcot to Vellore on 26th May 1930 and also molested two excise peons and two police constables. The bus was pelted with stones by the mob. The police came to the spot, opened fire and dispersed the crowd. In the meetings, Durgabai addressed the audience to disobey the Madras Salt Act. As things were getting rather out of control, orders were issued to prosecute Durgabai and others who disobeyed the orders.

Durgabai was arrested on 26th May 1930 and she tendered an apology. She was however tried by the District Magistrate of Vellore on 26.5.1930 at Vellore tried her and she was sentenced to nine months simple imprisonment. On her release, Durgabai took over the leadership of the city campaign after T. Prakasam. Once again Durgabai was arrested. On the arrest of Durgabai, L. Krishna Ayyar became the leader of the campaign. On the evening of 22nd July 1930 Varahaluammal exhorted the public of kanchivaram town to break the Salt Law. She delivered a speech before an audience of about 50 persons at the Sankusapet Maidan. In the course of her speech, she was alleged to have characterised the salt tax as an unjust levy by the British Government which has impoverished India to the extent of 20 crores annually. She was arrested and produced before the Magistrate the charges; she refused to offer any apology for making anti-government speeches. She was convicted on 23rd July 1930 under the Salt Act and was sentenced to six months simple imprisonment.

The salt satyagraha get momentum in other district in Tamil Nadu. In Coimbatore, Savithri Ammal, Padmavathi, Bagiyalakshmi Ammal, Kamalammal vigorously participated in the movement. Chamundi, Rama, and Radha of North Arcot district and Sakunthala Bai at South Arcot district were some of the other active participants at the Salt Satyagraha Movement.

In Triunelveli district, Raklammal of Koilpatti was an active participant of the Salt Movement. She was born in 1867 and she was an educated woman. She joined in the National Movement in 1920. She participated in the Salt Satyagraha, and arrested and courted imprisonment. Moreover Lakshmi, Savithri and Bhilal Ammal also participated in this movement. Seetha of Nilgiri District, Nannubai Ammal and Thiyal Nayagi Ammal from Tanjore District, Kunjammal of Ramanathapuram District, Padmavathy Asher of Tiruppur were the permanent participants in the Salt Satyagraha.

In Salem district, R.C. Caveri, Alamelu Ammal, Angachiammal and Sakuntala Bai

Gurjali participated in the Salt Satyagraha Movement and they were arrested and jailed. Caveri and Alamelu Ammal were sentenced for six month imprisonment, Angachiammal for nine months and Sakuntala Bai Gurjali for four months.

A statistical report shows that the total number of people arrested and sentenced in jail from Madras were 3,490 of which the women Satyagraha were 291. The women who were arrested in the movement were badly treated; they were given jail sentence from four months to two years. They were ill treated in the Coimbatore, Vellore and Cuddalore Jail. Women had no special consideration; they were also paid the penalty for their faults. If they failed to pay the penalty, they were imprisoned for four months.

CONCLUSION

Women of Tamil Nadu played an exceptional role in the Salt Satyagraha Movement. The sacrifice made by the women in the Civil Disobedience Movement gave a new passion to many other women, who bravely take part the National Movement such as the Individual Satyagraha and Quit Indian Movement.

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